



The PackRat

Newsletter of the Rocky Mountain Ramblers Association February/March 2003



Hiking in short pants on the northwest peak of Pigeon Mountain on November 2, 2002.

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President's Report...

We have had a couple of situations recently that have raised my concerns regarding Winter Safety. The theme of this message is to remind members of considerations we should all be taking into account at this time of year.

It is cold and gets dark early. Despite some record warm temperatures this winter, the days are not very long and once the sun is gone it can get very cold. Even on an easy trail, if you are not moving because you sprained an ankle you will need extra clothing with good insulation. A flashlight or headlamp carried by each person can facilitate a safe return if there is some delay past sundown. Extra food can provide energy if the trip becomes extended and a thermos of hot beverage can warm you up.

The terrain may be different. We have been hiking into January and if there is snow cover on some sections of the trails, the path may no longer be apparent. Participants should try to research the route before going on the

activity and bring along a map so they can contribute knowledge in the event there is confusion about the route. Also, snow and ice may increase the difficulty of hikes so keep in mind our hiking ratings are based on good summer conditions.

Trip participants are less than in summer.

Fewer of our members participate in winter activities so there may not be as many people on a trip to help out in the event of an incident. This puts even greater onus on each person to come prepared for any eventuality.

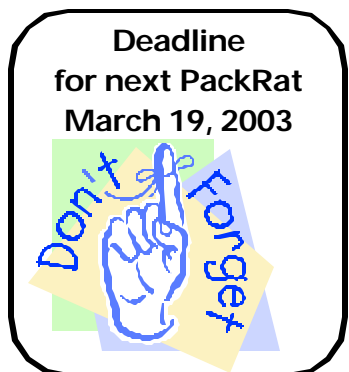
Abide by the RMRA avalanche policy. Our policy was developed in response to the worst incident that can happen to a member. All members on a ski, snowshoe or hiking trip should be able to identify avalanche risk situations as trips could inadvertently stray into them if they get off course. The avalanche policy is in the Outdoor Guide (**Chapter 5: Safety Policies and Guidelines**) and when you sign your waiver form you acknowl-

edge that you have read the guide. You can also review the website copy of the guide accessed via the Reference Information link on the title page.

Keep in mind that Coordinators may deny participation to an individual that they feel is not properly equipped for the planned activity. If you are unsure about what to bring, call the Coordinator to discuss requirements.

With a little forethought and acquisition of knowledge by everyone we can all contribute to the success of our activities...so enough lecturing on my part.

***Get out and enjoy
the winter!***



The Packrat

Trials with Trails – Kananaskis Country

by D. Reimer

Kananaskis Country (K-country) covers over 40,000 km² area. It is probably Ramblers' most popular recreation destination.

In the past year, concern about maintenance and replacement of facilities and trails has blossomed into a major issue. Last summer's lack of trail work and the possible cancellation of ski trail grooming forced many outdoor clubs out of their complacent acceptance of K-country's as an inexpensive recreation destination.

Following is a summary of issues, some facts, and a few actions to consider plus a list of contacts.

Issues

Reduced Maintenance

Trails: No maintenance in 2002 except for some work done to clear a few for possible skiing.

Equipment: No new equipment. Present snow equipment unreliable, slow, 25 years old.

Pit toilets: Reduced from 4 to 2 per location at trail-heads.

Visitor Centres: Closed 2 days/week.

- No guarantee for continued ski trail grooming.
- Loss of labour formerly provided by Minimum Security Camp inmates. Value about \$400,000.

Replacement

- No Government funding to replace lost inmate labour.
- 2 new sewer/water systems installed (2002)
- Staff cutback and some positions not filled.
- No Government budget to replace aging equipment.

New Parks

- New parks have been created without funding.
- K-country and Friends of Kananaskis have proposals for new trails and capital projects but no money is available to either build or maintain these.

Facts, Recent Events

1. K-country's annual operating budget (2002/3) is \$8.34 m (35% less than '94's total of \$13 m). Breakdown: \$4.7 m for salaries, \$3 m supplies/

Activities

Hiking, Backpacking,
Skiing, Cycling,
Climbing,
Scrambling,
Mountaineering, Educa-
tion & Awareness
Programs, Social
Functions

Meetings

Every Wednesday
evening at 7:30 p.m.

Mail

Rocky Mountain Ram-
blers Association
c/o Calgary Area Out-
door Council (CAOC)
1111 Memorial Dr NW
Calgary, AB T2N 3E4

Trip Info

282-6308 Information
Line and at Meetings

Website

The Packrat is available
on the RMRA website at
www.ramblers.ab.ca. If
we have your email
address, you will be
automatically notified
that an electronic copy
of the Packrat is on the
website.

services, \$.5 m contract
services, \$.1 m miscellane-
ous. The 2002/03 budget
was unchanged from 2001/
02.

2. Minimum Security
Camp (\$400,000 labour)
closed fall, 2001, by Solici-
tor General's Dept. (cost-
cutting measure). K-
country funding not in-
creased to compensate.

3. Province's 2002/3
capital budget for all 150
Parks and Protected Areas
is \$1.2 m. About 50% of
this was used for the 2 new
water/sewer systems in K-
country. (It doesn't leave
much for the rest of the
province.)

4. Snow grooming equip-
ment is original, old, slow,
unreliable. Some equipment
is being leased, especially
for Nordic Centre.

5. In summer 2002, trail
maintenance was cancelled
due to lack of available
staff.

6. Friends of Kananaskis
coordinate volunteers for
summer trail maintenance
one day/month, from May
to Sept. This was cancelled
in 2002 except for work at
the end of summer to
prepare a few trails for
possible skiing.

7. For winter 2002/3, K-
country staff planned not
to groom ski trails.

8. On Sept. 30, 25 repre-
sentatives from 15 Calgary
outdoor ski clubs (including
Ramblers) met to learn the
issues and formulate a
response. About 10 from
this meeting agreed to
coordinate action including
setting up and maintaining
dialogue with K-country
management.

9. Members of the clubs
began a letter-writing
campaign to MLAs, to the
Minister, Hon. Gene
Zwozdesky, and to K-
country senior personnel.

10. Two productive meet-
ings were held with K-
country staff (Oct. 22, Dec.
16).

11. MLA Karen Kryczka
brought the issue forward
in the Legislature in Nov.

12. In late Nov., K-country
agreed to groom trails in 3
areas. To pay for this, they
cut services (see above) and
hired 6 temporary labour-
ers.

Action

A few tips on how to be
effective:

GET THE FACTS. Read the
news. Ask questions.

WORK TOGETHER, with other club members, with other clubs.

SEND A LETTER to your MLA, copies with to key people. Handwritten is best, typed next best, e-mail least effective.

FOLLOW UP your letters with a visit to MLA's office for a chat.

KNOW what action you want and **ASK** for it.

BE CLEAR, precise, and polite.

BE PREPARED.

What You Can Do

Remember, this is about more than ski trails. It affects hiking and biking even more. No maintenance means bridges aren't replaced, fallen trees aren't cut out, trail braiding gets worse and, sometimes, closure of popular trails.

1. Continue writing letters: to your MLA, to Mr. Zwozdesky, to K-country (see **Contacts** list).

2. Notify K-country when you find a Trail in Trouble (see list). You can also tell them if you encounter some good work they've done.



Ole Buck Loop Trail. Photo taken by Carl Potter in December 2002.

3. Lobby your MLA for increased funds.

4. Volunteer for Trail Maintenance Crews when asked. Very **IMPORTANT**.

5. Push for a K-country roundtable where representative stakeholders meet 1-2 times/year to deal with concerns.

6. Make sure recreation users (like Ramblers) have as much say in K-country operation as commercial and environmental stakeholders.

7. Join Friends of Kananaskis or make a donation. They do lots for trail users and would do

more with more money. They also work constantly to get K-country to do their part.

8. Become **PROACTIVE** not **REACTIVE**.

CONTACTS

Government/K-country
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Kananaskis Country
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Middle-Age Fitness

by D.Mulligan

About a year ago, I wrote an article on **Middle-Age Fitness** referring to the 200,000 vertical hiking feet (8,000 feet per week) achieved by Bill Leach and Arnold Westberg in 1976.

Once again, I kept track of my activity from October 1, 2001 through October 1, 2002, primarily to verify what was my "normal" activity level.

The Stats are below. Some comments:

1. My running and squash

Activity	Total		Weekly Average	
	2002	2001	2002	2001
Hiking Vertical(m):	41,340	34,520	1,063	1,330
Skiing Vertical(m)	14,260	15,690	550	600
Total Vertical(m):	55,600	50,210	1,069	965
Hiking Distance(km)	1,294	1,120	25	21
Skiing Distance(km):	384	478	14	18
Running Distance(km):	144	736	5.5	28
Total Distance(km):	1,822	2,334	35	45
Squash Matches	8	92	0	2.7
Road Cycling(km)	1636	674	31	20
Tent Nights	20	32	-	-
Hut/Hostel Nights	32	12	-	-

The hiking vertical and road cycling average comparisons are approximate as the 2002 totals are for year-round and the 2001 totals seasonal.

See you on the trails!

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Reporting Trail Conditions/Problems in K-Country

It also wouldn't hurt to say thanks when you see something praiseworthy.

Barrier Lake Visitor Centre

PH: 310-0000, 403-673-3985

E-mail:

BarrierVisitor.InfoCenter@gov.ab.ca

OR

Peter Lougheed Visitor Centre

PH: 310-0000, 403-591-6322

E-mail:

PLH.VisitorInfoCenter@gov.ab.ca

Valentine's Potluck

This event will be held on Wednesday, February 12, 2003 at 7:00 pm.

Please bring either a dessert or finger foods to serve six or eight people; a plate; cutlery; and a cup. We will be providing the coffee and punch.

There will also be a slide presentation so come and enjoy a good time.



**SAIT
Gourmet Dining
March 3**

We have a reservation for 20 people for the Highwood Dining Room at SAIT for Monday, March 3, 2003 at 6:30 PM.

This will be a five-course gourmet dinner at a cost of \$40 per person which includes gratuities and GST. Drinks are extra.

This is a very popular event. You can sign up at the meetings or email the **socialdirector@ramblers.ab.ca**. Payment must be received in order to re-serve your spot.

Hope to see you there!

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Tragedy in the Bull Creek Hills

by D. Reimer

It was 3:04 pm, Tuesday, December 11, 1951, a good forecast and clear sunny weather, when three R.C.A.F. Harvard Trainer planes left Medicine Hat bound for Calgary. Soon the sunshine gave way to cloud and semi-blizzard conditions. As they approached Calgary, the ceiling had dropped to ground level. Instructions to divert to Claresholm were issued. Two landed safely. The third Trainer vanished.

In the missing plane were pilot Flying Officer Cyril Douglas Wilken from Redvers, Sask., and mechanic Corporal Clifford Johnson from Canterbury, NB. Flying with barely 15 yards visibility and no idea where they were, they suddenly saw a mountain looming in front. Desperately, Wilken tried to climb but the plane stalled and crashed violently on the steep hillside, coming to rest at a 45 deg. angle, wedged against some trees. Wings and parts of the fuselage and tail section were ripped away. Johnson

was thrown clear but Wilken was trapped in the cockpit. It was 4:30 pm, very cold, snowing, and already dark. It would be 2 days before Johnson found help and another 14 hours before searchers would reach Wilken.

The site of this tragedy was the Bull Creek Hills, that high range of hills east of Holy Cross and Mt. Head. The search and rescue operations was headline news in The Albertan newspaper for days. Until the early 90s, some of the remains of the Trainer lay back in the brush and trees only a few hundred meters off one of today's popular hiking trails, a traverse from Marston Creek to Grass Pass near the eastern Kananaskis Country boundary, 30 km southwest of Longview.

Johnson's account of the aftermath of the crash is gripping to read. Unconscious for the first 1 ½ hours, when he came to he feared making a fire because it might burn the plane

where Wilken lay. After a time he thought he heard search planes. In fact, the continuous drone of engines came from an oil rig in nearby Trap Creek where Canadian New Delhi #1 was drilling but the mechanic never knew this. Disoriented and confused, he didn't realize that planes would not be searching at night in a storm.

Throughout Wednesday, Johnson tried to free Wilken but without tools to cut into the cockpit he finally had to give up. Another 30 cm of snow fell overnight. Wilken was becoming delirious and Johnson decided to try to walk out. As he said, while he might die looking for help, it was no worse than dying by the downed plane. He left before daylight, Thursday, around 6 am., struggling through thigh-deep snow. The clouds had lifted but it was still very cold. Shortly after noon, he encountered Ray Beagle, out hunting in the hills. Beagle took him back to his camp and from there they travelled out to the Stampede Ranch to alert the searchers.

A rescue team set out from Stampede Ranch

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Thursday at 5:30 pm. Johnson didn't know where the wreck was and the team had to find his tracks and backtrack. Bill Diebel, who ranched just south of the present highway, set out on horseback with one of his hands, Charlie Williams, to intercept the team and it was he who found the crash site at 2:30 Friday morning.

Wilken was freed and brought out on a stretcher to the Stampede Ranch and from there he was airlifted to Calgary to the Colonel Belcher hospital. Feet and hands were frozen. Doctors worked to thaw his extremities but by Monday they found that there were internal injuries as well and his condition was given as "seriously ill". Sadly, he died Wednesday morning, his wife at his bedside.

For over 25 years the remains of the Harvard Trainer lay untouched at the original site. Then in the '80s, they were dragged further out of the bush. Angus Henley, a long-time Rambler coordinator, often detoured from the trail to show hikers the plane parts. Finally, in the early '90s, someone went in and scavenged the last of the

brilliant yellow fuselage and wings. Today, nothing is left to remind us of the tragedy and heroism of those men who lived this story.

Next time you near the summit on a hike in the Bull Creek Hills, look around and imagine a meter of snow and bitter cold temperatures. Take a moment to remember.

SOURCE: THE ALBERTAN, ISSUES OF DECEMBER 13 TO 19, 1951. ANGUS HENLEY, PERSONAL COMMUNICATION

PACKRAT ADVERTISING RATES

The Club offers advertising space in **PackRat** and the following rates apply:

Quarter Page	\$10
Half Page	\$20
Full Page	\$40

Payment MUST be received prior to publication.



New Zealand in December 2001

by D. Mulligan

In December 2001, I visited New Zealand for the fourth time in 15 years.

The previous occasions were in 1985, 1992, 1995 each in December. This past trip, I confined myself to the South Island only and mixed several serious backpacks and day hikes with some more leisurely activity on the East coast near Christchurch. The variety of this small country is amazing and well worth a visit by all outdoor persons. The snag is the airfare: about Can \$2000. Some observations follow:

1. Go for as long as you can afford. The return airfare is about \$2000 but otherwise things are relatively cheap with NZ\$1.00 = Can\$0.75.
2. November/December or March/April is a good time to visit.
3. The Lonely Planet Guidebooks: Tramping in New Zealand and New Zealand are recommended.
4. Discounts abound with an International Hostel card.
5. There are 50 International Hostels and 200

backpacker hostels, rightly rated as the world's best. About NZ\$20.00/person/night. Naturally, there is also the usual assortment of motels, hotels, B & B's, trailer parks etc.

6. There are about 2000 hiking huts run by the Department of Conservation (DOC). Cost is usually NZ\$10/person/night or annual NZ\$70. Excellent value, no need for a tent (or foamy).

7. Good raingear is essential. The country is very green for a reason. It rains (up to 400 inches/year in Milford Sound (Calgary gets 10" a year).

8. You will need reasonable footwear but it will get wet and muddy. Bring your outdoor gear from Canada - it's not cheaper in NZ.

9. If backpacking you will need a stove. Coleman fuel is available if you can get the stove in (theoretically illegal-see MEC). I recommend an MSR wisper light or equivalent. Separate the burner from the bottle and fill the bottle with water for the flight and hope noone

asks. Good luck. Stoves can be bought in NZ but are expensive (above wisper light about Can\$180)

10. The hiking trails are harder than in Canada with many little ups and downs in mud or over tree roots. With a daypack I could meet or better their times but exceeded them with a backpack. Expect wet feet and many river crossings.

11. Many hiking trails are below tree line in the bush.

12. The largest mammal is a deer. There are no large predators eg bear, cougar. There are sand flies.

10. Travelling by bus is excellent from city to city but useless otherwise. If 2 or more I suggest car rental. You could then use the excellent cheap tent camp sites but remember it rains. Only foreigners use the buses or cycle but if fit, the latter is possible (get a low gear).

11. Auckland is the only busy place.

12. NZ beer is good (NZ 5.00/pint), ice-cream excellent, local food good quality but being English based a little boring (this is improving), tap water is good to drink (but purify

backcountry), there are excellent muesli breakfast cereals and snack bars, the wine is very drinkable.

13. Lastly they speak English and are very friendly and helpful, but drive on the “wrong” left side of the road.

Have a good holiday!

Humour



“A funeral service is being held for a woman who has just passed away. At the end of the

service, the pall bearers are carrying the casket out when they accidentally bump into a wall, jarring the casket. They hear a faint moan! They open the casket and find that the woman is actually alive! She lives for ten more years, and then dies. Once again, a ceremony is held, and at the end of it, the pall bearers are again carrying out the casket. As they carry the casket towards the door, the husband cries out: “Watch that wall!”

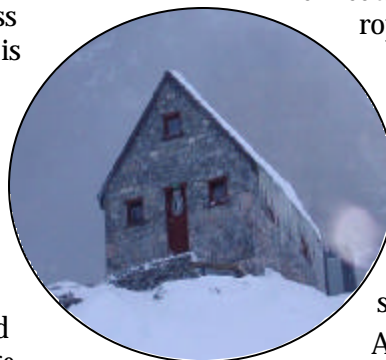
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Glacier Hiking Weekend

by Irene Willett

Eleven of us signed up for a weekend of glacier hiking organized by the U of C Outdoor Program. We were going to Abbots Pass with an overnight stay at the highest (elevation 2926 metres) and the historic alpine cabin in Canada, the Abbot Pass Hut. The hut is situated in a narrow pass between Lakes O’Hara and Louise. The next day will see us descend the deep gorge between Mts. Victoria and Lefroy – a.k.a the Death Trap.

The Pass was named after Phillip Stanley Abbot who fell to his death while trying to summit Mount Lefroy in 1896. The provincial boundaries between Alberta and BC run over the two mountain peaks and the hut is located right in the middle of the pass. Abbot Pass Hut was built by Swiss mountain guides in 1922 and now is a National Historic Building.



The Alpine Club of Canada now maintains it.

We all met at the Lake O’Hara parking lot on the Saturday morning of September, 2002. Each of us is equipped with a set of crampons, a harness, a helmet and some

ropes. The forecast for the day calls for a 60% chance of rain and some thunderstorms.

After a bus ride to Lake O’Hara in the rain, we follow the stone trail built by Lawrence Grassi to Lake Oesa (2275 m). Along the way, there is a plaque commemorating his dedication to mountaineering and his passion for trail building in the Rockies in the late ‘50s. At the far end of this lake is the beginning of our ascent on the wide scree gully leading to Abbots Pass. By this time, the rain turns into slush and then into light snow. The climb is



PHOTO CREDIT CAROL GUTHRIE

*Looking up to Abbot Hut
from Lake Oesa*

steep and with the heavy pack seems somewhat grueling. There is fear of loose rock falling and the uncertainty of footing under the new fallen snow. Every so often, I would turn back and admire the surrounding magnificent peaks between passing clouds. This is truly the most spectacular scenery I have yet encountered in the Rockies. Only 650 m of vertical scrambling left to go! About an hour and a half into the scramble, I see my first sight of a tiny black speck that is the Abbots Pass hut. My pace picks up and also my pounding heart. Soon I will be there but the wind and snow adds to my struggle. The uncertainty of my footsteps over snow and rocks slows me down and

the hut seems still so far away. Finally, with the encouragement and support by Dave, the guide, I reach the top. What a great relief only to be disappointed with the scenery that is obscured by the blustering wind and

swirling snow. For a moment I imagine an awesome view on a clear and sunny day but I scurry into the hut for some dry warmth and a hot drink.

The wind continues to howl all night. I couldn't tell if there is more fresh snow coming down. Sunday's forecast was for

warmer weather and sunshine. It is a restless night for me in anticipation of the next day's descent to the other side of the pass and down through the death trap to the Plain of Six Glaciers and out to Lake Louise.

Meanwhile, we are all snug in the hut. However, going to the outhouse was a challenge: one step off the path either way and you can probably find yourself back down at Lake Oesa in BC or at the bottom of Plain of Six Glaciers in Alberta.

After a night's rest, better for some than others, we are up early preparing for our day's adventure on the glacier. Most of us weren't quite sure what to expect, as we have never traveled on a glacier before. The mood is quiet and reflective. It had snowed about a foot since yesterday afternoon and the sky doesn't look very promising.

We are split into two groups and with attached ropes are ready to set out under the careful guidance of Albi and Dave. During the descent, I envision for a split moment that the

PHOTO CREDIT CAROL GUTHRIE



Looking down on Lake Oesa



PHOTO CREDIT CAROLGUTHRIE

*Waiting above the crevasse
at the belay station.*

conditions and scenario resemble what must be like when traversing the glacier on Mt. Everest.

Our guides are now setting up a belay station so that Dave can lower us down one by one into the crevasse. Albi will pull each of us over to the other side of the crevasse. It doesn't seem like such a big deal while standing at the top of the crevasse but then we really can't see where we are going or how far down it is.

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My turn is next. I hook myself into the belay station, and then walk backwards to the edge of the crevasse. Then, I lay down on my belly and Dave lowers me over the edge. If you are quick and brave you could sneak a peak way down. What an exhilarating feeling to be suspended in the air and looking down into the depths of the crevasse!

Albi was standing on the other side of the crevasse and would tell Dave how far down to lower me. Albi would then start to pull on the other rope attached to me and pull me to his side of the crevasse. From there I would walk up to him and onto a flat surface.

There's no other experience quite like dangling over a huge drop by what seems a thin rope. Having such experienced and competent guides, I felt confident that I was safe and in good hands.

Peter, a more-experienced client, is now leading the first group that I was part of, down the glacier. We are cautioned that there are always chances of ice breaking off the glaciers from the cliffs above. We

move quickly until we are clear of any danger. We reach the end of the snow but there are still many small crevasses underneath the rock. Safety is still an issue so we leave our crampons on until we are well off the ice. Every so often I look back in amazement at what transpired. Up ahead, I can see Lake Louise with the Chateau at the far end of the lake.

We all got down safely with no injuries or mishaps...just as promised. "The most dangerous part is driving back to the city" said Albi at the pre-trip meeting.

We had coffee and snacks at the bakery and headed home with our memorable experience engraved in our memory forever.

The Packrat is published six times a year by the Rocky Mountain Ramblers Association. We welcome comments, articles, and ideas from our members and, if content is deemed suitable, will be used as space permits.

Email submissions to the newsletter editor at packrat@ramblers.ab.ca or forward contributions to RMRA, c/o Calgary Area Outdoor Council, 1111 Memorial Drive NW, Calgary, AB T2N 3E4.

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